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SUBJECT: GOI REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO AFGHANISTAN DURING
PRESIDENT KARZAI'S VISIT

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Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: During President Hamid Karzai's April 9-13 visit to India, the GOI reinforced its substantial support for Afghanistan with the announcement of an additional USD 50 million in assistance, the signing of three MoUs, and positive statements from both sides about their bilateral partnership. Our interlocutors at the Ministry of External Affairs and the Afghan Embassy underscored the positive tone of the meetings as reflected in official statements which focused on Indian development efforts and technical assistance in Afghanistan. The bilateral discussions also included security, parliamentary training, and administrative capacity-building in Afghanistan, and the impact of India-Pakistan ties on Afghanistan. Notably, however, both sides downplayed press reporting of Karzai's alleged proposal for "tripolar" cooperation between India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Karzai was accompanied by several ministers, including outgoing Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah and Rural Development Minister Hanif Atmar, as well as business leaders and members of the Afghan National Assembly. Karzai's visit proved yet again the significant extent to which India supports his government, and the close nature of ties between Delhi and Kabul. End Summary.

Tripolarity: "Just My Imagination"

12. (C) In an April 17 meeting with Poloff and the Russian

Political Counselor, MEA Afghanistan director Acquino Vimal dismissed press reports that Karzai proposed an India-Pakistan-Afghanistan approach to regional issues as completely false; "that's the trouble with the press here," he added, "we have no checks on the reporting, and you'll get no retraction." According to Vimal, Karzai "never said it...he doesn't want to get involved in Indo-Pak." In an April 18 conversation with Poloff, Afghan Political Counselor Abdul Shoogufan offered a slightly softer interpretation of Karzai's intentions while asserting that Karzai did not actually propose a trilateral dialogue. All of Afghanistan's discussions with India and Pakistan would be bilateral for the foreseeable future, but Shoogufan offered up "one window" for trilateral talks in the context of Afghanistan's impending SAARC membership.

Transit Trade: "Time Is On Our Side"

¶3. (C) MEA's Vimal clarified that Karzai simply stated that the transit allowances granted by the GOP for Indian exports to Afghanistan were a good step and trade liberalization should continue in parallel with progress on Kashmir. Karzai offered again to raise with Musharraf the issue of expanding India's transit trade rights through Pakistan, but Vimal was adamant that these talks would not involve India. He went on to note, somewhat hopefully, that it is "just a matter of time" before Pakistan resolves its "border issues." He pointed out that more than political will, the real barrier to expanded Afghan transit trade is the lack of infrastructure links between India and Pakistan. Vimal was less sanguine, however, about the impending transfer of about 200 buses to Afghanistan, commenting that the buses should all be in Afghanistan by some time in July, as long as Pakistan does not rescind its transit approval between now

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and then. Shoogufan clarified that written approval from "all the relevant departments" had been received this time, in contrast to the most recent transfers of buses from India to Afghanistan, which had to be shipped via Iran rather than transiting Pakistan, as was done in 2002.

Both Sides Express "Satisfaction" with GOI Aid

¶4. (C) Shoogufan said more than once that India has been very generous in its assistance to Afghanistan, a comment underscored by Vimal, who noted that the GOI typically does not act as a major donor, especially in a country where the benefits are "indirect." Both Shoogufan and Vimal reported that Karzai's meetings and those of his delegation focused on areas in which India could assist Afghanistan in capacity building, including training for parliamentarians, providing educational opportunities for Afghans, and rural development. On the latter, Shoogufan commented that India has vast experience in this area from which Afghanistan could benefit. Vimal added that the main reason for the additional USD 50 million in aid was that the GOI had already committed to projects worth nearly USD 650 million, so "why not announce the new number." He indicated that about USD 10 million has not yet been programmed, but would likely be picked up soon in some projects already under GOI consideration.

"Gimme Shelter" (and Aid)

¶5. (C) India will also extend a USD 50 million line of credit, the modalities of which, Vimal reported, were yet to be worked out. Vimal was generally pleased and positive about the outlook for India's large projects in Afghanistan, noting that the construction of the parliament building should start by March 2007 for completion in mid 2010, and the Pul-e-Kumri power line to Kabul and the Salma Dam are both on track for completion in early 2009. However, he acknowledged security and administrative delays in India's

Border Roads Organization effort to build the Zaranj-Delaram road to Iran had pushed the completion date back to mid-2008.

This project has suffered from both Taliban attacks and Iranian unwillingness to facilitate logistical support to the Indian road building crews.

No Security Help "Undercover of the Night"

¶6. (C) In response to the Russian Political Counselor's inquiry, Vimal commented that India has "no real intentions" on defense cooperation with the ANA. Vimal noted that the GOI had offered resources for police force capacity building, such as information and communications technology and police training, including for female police officers, but modalities still needed to be worked out by the Indian Embassy in Kabul. He added that India's security assistance to Afghanistan was currently limited to non-combat materials given "Pakistani sensitivities as relayed by the US." Vimal concluded ambiguously on this issue, however, saying that "we have our lines drawn," but this is an "evolving issue." Shoogufan and Vimal indicated that the delegation level talks did not include discussion of any terrorist threat coming from Pakistan.

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Comment: "Happy"...With Relations

¶6. (C) Consistent with the Prime Minister's efforts to portray India as a regional leader, the MEA read-out of President Karzai's visit focused on the many areas of cooperation in India's relationship with Afghanistan. Vimal's comments playing down the Pakistan angle are further evidence Delhi's resolve not to allow differences with Pakistan to detract from its superb bilateral relations with Kabul.

¶7. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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